



Good idea for state officials to observe vote

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Allegations of voter fraud in San Luis usually involve the mishandling of early ballots, a system that some in San Luis believe must be made more fraud-proof or eliminated.

Confidence in the fairness of the election system is vital in a democracy, which may explain why three state officials will be in San Luis, Ariz., today monitoring voting for mayor and council seats.

Yuma County and San Luis officials invited the state observers to participate after Secretary of State Ken Bennett offered to come. He will be joined by Assistant Secretary of State Jim Drake and State Elections Director Amy Bjelland.

The decision apparently comes in the wake of allegations of voter fraud in the border city in the previous election there. The allegations were made in a letter written by a supporter of incumbent Mayor Juan Carlos Escamilla who is seeking re-election.

The letter alleges that Nieves Riedel, Escamilla's opponent, manipulated or destroyed early ballots in the 2006 election. It was written by Guillermina Fuentes, who had ties to Riedel at the time. Riedel has strenuously denied any wrongdoing.

Frankly, it is not the first time we have heard allegations of voter fraud in San Luis. These charges usually involve the mishandling of early ballots, a system that some in San Luis believe must be made more fraud-proof or eliminated.

The problem is not with ballots mailed or turned in directly to county election officials by voters. However, there is a practice in San Luis where candidates either help voters with their ballots or they have voters give them the ballots which they then turn in for them. Once in the hands of candidates, there are then mishandled, according to the allegations.

Honest elections are the backbone of our free society. Manipulation of votes cannot be tolerated.

We are glad to see state officials taking an interest in these allegations. Perhaps they can either help prove or disprove them, whether in the election today or past elections.

If nothing else, perhaps they can come up with some recommendations for better ways to handle the early balloting system so there is more confidence in it. A good start would be a prohibition on any candidate's involvement with the process.

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